

FY 2006 E-Government Act Report

U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

1. Provide a brief overview of your agency's implementation of the Act including a description of an internal agency-specific E-Government initiative.

HUD continues its E-Government transformation to meet public expectations and government performance mandates through Vision 2010, a five-year plan to modernize HUD's business processes and information technology environment. More than just an opportunity to save money, Vision 2010 offers improved customer service to our employees and business partners, as well as to citizens alike. Vision 2010 leverages planned modernization investments and improves upon HUD's delivery of service and information. Important components of Vision 2010 include building an agile and secure infrastructure with shared tools to enhance our current applications and replacing redundant or aging (25 to 30 year old) systems.

HUD's Correspondence Tracking System (CTS) is an important initiative within the Vision 2010 plan. HUD annually receives thousands of correspondence that require analysis, categorization, response, and storage. For the past 25 years, HUD has relied on ACORN (Automated Correspondence On-line Response Network), a legacy system that provided limited correspondence processing automation, user access, tracking, and reporting capabilities, and a less than friendly user interface. This legacy system is being replaced by CTS, a web-based correspondence tracking and control system, which incorporates workflow management into a complete system integration lifecycle solution. CTS will also replace ACORN's supporting systems, the Correspondence Management System (CMS) and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Management System (FMS). CTS is designed to provide standardized processes for all incoming correspondence, with improved reporting capabilities and expanded functionality.

CTS is built on a COTS platform that stores, retrieves, and indexes documents, and routes tasks through predefined workflow processes. Both incoming and outgoing correspondence are categorized by topics of interest. Productivity is improved through continuous monitoring of workflow processes, thereby minimizing correspondence receipt, routing, and response time. Visibility and control over each work item gives Departmental offices the ability to execute, prioritize and expedite work more effectively. The system clearly and accurately reports the status of all tracked correspondence, protects the integrity of the correspondence data, provides necessary security for and archiving of response documentation, and accommodates changes to the interface and functionality of the system with minimum effort.

Although early in its staged implementation, all primary Headquarters offices and some subordinate offices have begun processing correspondence in CTS. To date over 500 documents have been entered into CTS rather than the old legacy correspondence system. Over 185 former ACORN/CMS users in 80 offices have been trained on the new system and are using it to process their correspondence. The system is in the process of being deployed to all Regional Offices and their respective Field Offices with expected completion scheduled for early in December 2006. No new correspondence is being entered into the CMS and its data will be converted into CTS in October 2006. The ACORN system will be retired by April 2007, with data conversion following. Correspondence specialists and other HUD staff, who are involved in correspondence processing for the Department, are participating in regularly scheduled CTS training and refresher sessions.

CTS allows for an overall reduction in file storage space, paper costs, shipping costs to NARA, staff inquiry, copying, and delivery time, and reduces correspondence response times. Once fully deployed this reduction is expected to rise to 40%. This initiative also reduces maintenance costs by standardizing and integrating data and replacing older, disparate systems with one enterprise solution.

The results and lessons learned from CTS will be incorporated and leveraged into the subsequent phases of this project. Additionally, CTS serves as the cornerstone for HUD's enterprise-wide electronic records management, case tracking, and FOIA processing web solution.

2. Describe your process for determining which information will be made available on your agency's public website and the Internet as required in Section 207(f)(2) of the Act.

HUD's Homes and Community website was developed as the information clearinghouse for citizens and current and future business partners. Consequently, HUD's websites already offers the most information commonly requested under the Freedom of Information Act and through email and telephone contacts. However, to ensure compliance with Section 207 of the E-Government Act, HUD's Departmental Web Team surveyed the Freedom of Information Act Officers throughout the Department and HUD staff who routinely respond to customer questions via phone and email, requesting them to identify any frequently requested information that is not already available on HUD's website. Based on that review, HUD identified the inventory of information priorities and schedules available on <http://www.hud.gov/about/inventory.cfm>. This Web Publication Schedule page also provides a link to HUD's Web Manager mailbox and solicits public comments and suggestions. As new information becomes available at HUD that is important to the public, the Department is committed to putting it on HUD's Homes and Community website.

For several years, both employees and citizens have requested a better search engine for www.hud.gov and a way to more easily access information from HUD@work. In January 2006, HUD unveiled the new search engine, Google, for both its internal and external sites. Responses for the implementation of Google have proven its success. Now, more than ever, information on HUD's Internet and intranet websites is easy to find and accessible within the click of a button.

3. Describe how your agency's information dissemination activities are coordinated with its FOIA operations in order to improve both access to and dissemination of government information to the public.

HUD's FOIA website contains accurate and useful information on how to file a FOIA request, as well as basic user-friendly information on the FOIA process. The HUD website also contains the required electronic reading room with a link to a "Frequently Requested Materials" section. The Frequently Requested Materials section currently contains a list of 19 items, which provide useful assistance to those seeking information on HUD programs. For example, one link proven to be very helpful to the public is entitled, "How to Buy a HUD Home." This link identifies what is a HUD home and provides information on how these homes are sold and who can buy and get financing for a HUD home.

There are also plans to reformat HUD's FOIA website to make it more user-friendly, accessible and easier to navigate. Changes in layout and design will make posted material easier to locate and review. A detailed index of all documents will also be included on the website, resulting in possible reduction of FOIA requests, as requestors will be able to quickly download the information that they need. Organization of this index will be made by program office, listing all of the program offices at HUD with a link indicating the documents posted on that program office's website (e.g. "Office of Public and Indian Housing," List is Public Housing Authorities by State," etc.)

Additional FOIA information that may be of interest to citizens will also be listed on the website, including a sample FOIA request letter, expected response times, information on the FOIA appeals process, and specific information regarding which FOIA requests should be directed to Headquarters and which should be directed to the field offices. The technical architectural solution for this process will leverage the existing CTS solution (described on page 1).

HUD's Information Resources Management (IRM) Strategic Plan is available at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cio/documents/itstratplan2.pdf> and the FOIA Improvement Plan is available at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/ogc/foia/hudfoiapiplanfinal.pdf>.